

# **Youth problems in Britain and in Russia**

by Yulia Belkina

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## **Introduction.**

Youth problems in global perspective represent the problems of each society as a whole. On the one hand there are objective reasons underlining these problems, such as globalization, informatization, urbanization etc. On the other hand, youth problems in each country have its own peculiarities, which route to the country history, politics, social and economic stability.

The younger generation, due to its psychological and emotional vulnerability, always seeks for the social identification and as a result is highly exposed to all the changes, happening in the society.

This paper analyzes the major problems and challenges that face the UK and Russian youth nowadays. Most of the reviewed problems are similar for both nations, those are family problems, drugs and alcohol abuse, social inequality, self underestimation and the early growing up in the modern world.

# Major youth problems.

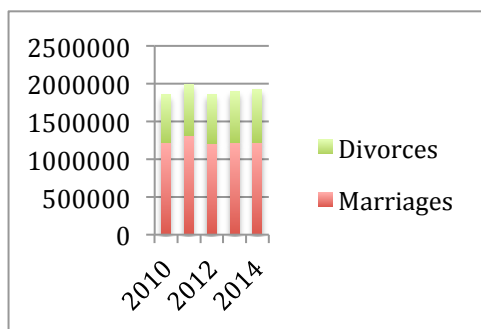
## Family problems.

Family problems are similar all over the world, the increase of divorces which has become a global tendency starting from the late 50s and the generation gap, the usual “Problem of fathers and sons”, misunderstanding between parents and teenagers will always remain the major problems that faces youth .

**1. Single parent families** have become a normal issue in the modern world. According to the most recent statistics approximately 40-50% of marriages in Russia and the UK end up by a divorce, meaning that the amount of children living in a single parent family is constantly rising.



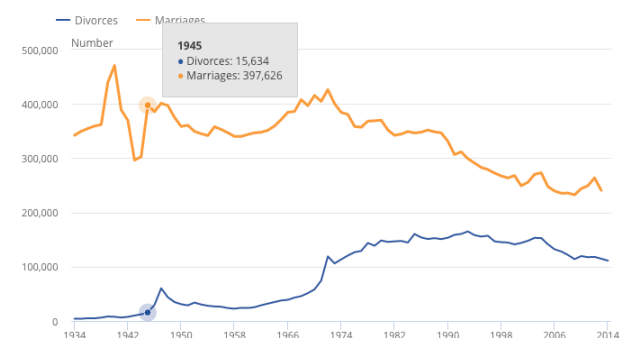
### Russia



### England and Wales

Figure 1: Number of marriages and divorces, 1934 to 2014

England and Wales



Source: Office for National Statistics

The recent figures indicate that the quantity of single parent families in Russia has reached the number of 6.2 million persons, meaning that only 70% of children grow up in full families. The UK shows approximately the same percentage, in 2014 it was estimated that lone parents with dependent children represented 25% of all families with dependent children. However we should admit that in the UK the amount of divorces has decreased recently, showing the lowest divorce rate during the last 30 years.

Economically, a single parent is likely to bring less income home. This equates to fewer opportunities for children in such vital necessities as education. In the attempt to earn a

living a single parent tend to spend less time at home earning money, what also means spending time away from children who need parent's guiding, attention and influence. Absent of parent's diligent guidance, puts children at a higher risk of frustration, violent behavior, dangerous sexual relations, higher chances of drug and alcohol abuse, antisocial performance and difficulties in socializing. Effects vary from child to child and the individual parenting style of a single parent is also a big influence on the child's development.

However single parenting can have positive effects on children, such children may exhibit strong responsibility skills, as they are often called upon to help out more with family responsibilities and tasks. Children in single-parent families often have more close relations with their parent, as they are highly dependent on each other throughout the child's life.

**2. "Problem of fathers and sons"** has always existed between the generations, it is not new. The main problem, in my opinion, may be formulated as follows: the younger generation believes themselves to be old enough for taking their own decisions for personal or social matters, while the elder generation just refuses to hand over this responsibility to them. And this problem is common everywhere.



However, in Russia the family relations remain to be of greatest importance to youth and the majority of young adults continue to live with their families up to the age of 24 and over, sometimes even with their young spouses. In Russia it is quite common for a young families to live with one of the spouse's parents, this is due to our traditions, housing problems and the usual assistance of grandmothers to the young mothers and their babies. The recent research performed by FOM (Fund of Social Opinion) indicates that for the majority of Russian teenagers, participating in the research, of the highest importance are still family relations (53%), while relations with their friends are rated to be on the second place (35%) and approximately 50% of Russian teenagers regularly spend time with their parents, at least when having a meal together.

The development of modern technologies has given an opportunity for children studying or living far from home to preserve close relations with their family members. Cellular phones, widening of the Internet coverage and the expansion of smart-phones, all facilitate communication.

Today Russian youth faces absolutely new realities in economic, social and political development comparing to their parents and grandparents, who grew up in Soviet (or Post-

Soviet) period. It means that most life principles, social relations, moral aspects and values vary to a great extent between generations. The biggest gap exists between youth and their grandparents, who seem to be stuck in their Soviet ideals, the majority neglect the development of IT technologies and are afraid of the Internet.

On the contrast, the British teenagers do not have such a tremendous ideological gap with their parents and grandparents. However the research indicates that they spend less time with their families, comparing to the other European countries, such as Italy and France. It is very common for British teenagers to leave their parents early and to start living on their own, for example sharing a rented apartment with a friend (what is still quite rare for Russia). In my opinion on the whole British teenagers receive much more freedom comparing to Russian ones, on the one hand this may help to form mature, responsible and self-confident personality, but on the other hand such freedom may signify lack of discipline and authority from parents side, teenagers learning from one another instead of taking on a positive example of their parents, what at the end may lead to choosing a wrong life direction by a teenager.

In the ideal world children should live in full families, with caring parents being a vivid example of how they should built their own life, social and family relations. The appropriate guidance of parents should help teenagers to find their place in life, choose the appropriate career opportunities, while at the same time should not bound their freedom of choice and allow teenagers to have a right to make their own mistakes.

### **Drug and Alcohol abuse.**

There was a time in cinematic history where virtually every actor/actress was portrayed on screen with a cigarette in hand. Smoking, it was implied, was cool. As a result everyone was doing it, including kids. Well, as awareness to the danger of smoking increased, “cool” images of smoking disappeared from the screens. Unfortunately, the same can’t be said about drugs and alcohol.

British teenagers are infamous for binge drinking. The BBC reports, “British teenagers out-drink their European counterparts, despite the UK’s tough restrictions on alcohol consumption.” According to the article, the World Health Organization has discovered that alcohol abuse is responsible for one in eight deaths among young men in the UK.

In a related article, the BBC reported that British teenagers are more likely than other



Europeans to have used illegal drugs. There are reports of children as young as eight drinking alcohol or smoking cannabis. In addition, the UK has one of the highest rates of teenage smokers among European nations.

A recent report revealed a steep increase in arrests of British young adults overseas: 33% in Spain and 42% in France over the previous years. Many arrests were due to behavior caused by excessive drinking. As far as vacations are concerned, many teenagers and young adults travel abroad to spend their free time drinking and partying in the nightclubs. Many of them choose Greece as the direction for the holidays, as there they can find cheap alcohol flows without end. Nightclubs pound out rhythmic beats. Thousands of youth go there to party and have sexual relations. The Sun newspaper reported about one Greek vacation spot: “It was once a peaceful fishing village, then an upmarket family resort—but today it is ruled by drunken young Brits.”

And Russia is even ahead of the UK with the drinking problem among its teenagers. About 90% of the population had their first drink before age 15 and 33% before age 10! It is a fact that the earlier in life one starts using, the more likely it is that they will be an



Russian citizens begin drinking around the age of 11 on average

addict someday; this is especially true when it comes to alcohol. Actually, people who start drinking before they're 15 years old are five times more likely to be an alcoholic or alcohol abuser someday than those who abstain until they're 21 years old. Although minors in Russia aren't allowed to buy alcohol, most claim they've never had a problem doing such, noting that regulations for alcohol sales aren't very stringent. It is quite likely that this fault in the Russian legislation contributed greatly to the widespread alcohol abuse and addiction among Russian youth. Hence, the legal drinking age was raised to 21 in recent years, and alcoholic beverages like beer — that were formerly considered as food in the eyes of the law — were upgraded to an alcohol status. In addition, alcohol can no longer be sold between 11 pm and 8 am in the supermarkets or at all by street vendors.

With limited border control and a large illegal immigrant population, Russia's legislation for the regulation of drugs isn't much better. Recent reforms to drug crime penalties mean people who possess small amounts of illegal drugs are no longer faced with the prospect of doing any time in jail. As a result the amount of teenagers addicted to drugs is constantly growing, as well as the amount of teenagers selling those drugs to their classmates in their struggle to find money for a new dose. Moreover, the synthetic drugs are also being widely spread nowadays. For the first time those drugs are offered for free to teenagers by local

drug dealers at the schoolyards, as the addiction to them normally appears after the first use. So once they try it – they are addicted.

Drinking and drug abuse by teenagers in both countries remain to be a big problem, it is always accompanied by antisocial behaviour (as people in the state of intoxication can hardly control their emotions and tend to be extremely aggressive), increase of crimes performed by teenagers and serious health problems and genetic damage (as reported by the World Health Organization). Those teenagers, having medical problems can hardly produce descendants, and even worse than that, cannot give birth to healthy children, meaning that the overall health condition of the nations may decline.

### **Social inequality.**

Social inequality is dramatic in Russia, where only 2% of the population are considered to be extremely rich and only 20% of the population form the middle class according to official statistics (however unofficial statistics determine this amount



to be only at the level of 7%). This extreme inequality, in my opinion, is one of the reasons why our society has become more materialistic, seeing enormous wealth always stimulates envy and desire to have it all, and especially show it in public. Moreover, the recent reform in the Russian education systems has made it practically impossible for quite a big part of the population to receive good high education free of charge, meaning that they will not get such education at all. Certainly, this reform was partly made in the attempt of the Russian government to supply our labour market with under qualified workers. However, it decreased the chances of the majority of the population in getting a good education and in its turn finding a better-paid job that will furthermore contribute to social division of our society.

Such tremendous inequality among Russian population often leads two to major outcomes in teenagers perception of their future: the first one is that they want to get everything from their life at once, immediately, without having to work long years to earn the income (“Oligarchs didn’t work, they just stole what used to be state property” – one of the teenager’s arguments). This stimulates rise of criminal activity, as well as absence of respect of authority. In our materialistic society it is always true that the person who has money is always at the top of others. The second outcome – teenagers underestimate themselves, consider that it is not worth trying to earn a living, that they will never succeed in achieving high goals, turn to depression, lack the desire of doing anything at all and as a result go on a drinking bout.



Britain in its turn has one of the worst rates of child poverty despite being one of the wealthiest and most prosperous nations on earth. This, of course, leads to many teenagers committing crime, feeling unattached from any productive part of society.

Knife crime is prevalent, a problem the government is trying to clamp down on, including passing legislation that will forbid teenagers younger than 18 to buy a knife. The Independent reports that youngsters as young as nine or 10 talk openly about stabbing those with whom they have any kind of problems. This aggressive behaviour is very much caused by such representatives of hip-hop music culture as 50 Cent, Eminem promoting the slogan of making the unacceptable acceptable.

Moreover, it is registered that in the UK young people face the worst economic prospects for several generations and their lives have got worse over the past five years. Young people suffer the biggest slide in income and employment and now face higher barriers to achieving economic independence and success. The level of youth unemployment is steadily growing, stimulation in its turn the decline in the level of salaries offered to younger workers.

Another tendency among the British teenagers is the increase in the gang culture. It is certainly a great pleasure for every teenager to perform illegal acts, especially knowing that they have nothing to lose, thus teenagers from lower social classes often get involved in gangs. Once a teenager joins a gang – it will be till his



death, that's a gang principle. The gang Gang-related organised crime in the United Kingdom is concentrated around the cities of London, Manchester and Liverpool and regionally across the West Midlands region, south coast and northern England, according to the Serious Organised Crime Agency. With regards to street gangs the cities identified as having the most serious gang problems, which also accounted for 65% of firearm homicides in England and Wales, were London, Birmingham, Manchester and Liverpool. Glasgow in Scotland also has a historical gang culture with the city having 6 times as many teenage gangs as London, which has ten times the population, per capita.

Increasingly, Britain's street gangs in certain inner city areas such as London and Manchester are becoming more of a cultural transmission, following the trends of American gangs. This is evidenced by identification with colours, hand signs, graffiti tags and in some cases gang names.

Debate persists over the extent and nature of gang activity in the UK today, with some academics and policy-makers arguing that the current focus of enforcement efforts on gang

membership is inadvisable, given a lack of consensus over the relationship between gangs and crime.

### **Growing up too fast.**

This is a problem that youth faces today all over the world. When the Internet came into our lives it erased all the informational barriers. Nowadays everyone can get access to any kind of information through the Internet, through search engines and social networks. And this flood of information can be quite useful for a grown up adult, who can filter its quality and content, ignore the violent, vulgar and other inappropriate records, but might be dangerous for teenagers. They are not that mature and neither can understand what is appropriate for their age, nor can filter the enormous quantities of information.

Starting from the early childhood children get access to IT resources. First by playing simple games on Ipads and smart phones, then by searching through the Internet engines. Adults do not even notice how fast children learn to use the computers and smart phones, but many parents actively use them in the everyday life in order to get their kids occupied. It is reported in the UK that less children play at the playgrounds in the parks, and go for walks with their parents, as this time is spent in the computers, playing various games.



The risk of youth wasting huge amounts of time on social networks like Facebook and Twitter as well as the shared videos of YouTube is considered to be a problem, however some scientist argue that this problem might be overestimated and that these resources can actually promote psychological development.

Many teenagers nowadays use the Internet as a tool for exploring questions of personal identity, successfully building their own future lives using what they discover on the Web. To some extend the engagement with the online world can be beneficial for teenagers. Social networking is a positive example of Internet use, it is not the same as gaming through the Internet and in this respect the characteristics of the disorder called "Internet addiction" should be reconsidered. Some Internet use (such as gambling and gaming) is destructive and isolating while at the same time some is informative and serves a socializing function. Thant is why many physiatrists today argue that the "Internet addition" term should be reconsidered in terms of quality of

information but not quantity of hours spent in the web.

Parents and educators should change the conversations they have with teenagers about Internet use. The Web is a big part of our modern lifestyle, and both adults and children are spending more time there. As a result, what is important is how that time is used. Students must learn to use the Internet in a healthy way – as a source of knowledge about themselves in relation to their peers around the world. If parents still don't like the amount of time their teenagers are spending in front of the computer, they should consider becoming an information resource for their adolescent children, encouraging a healthy flow of conversation in the household itself.

The younger generation will never give up the Internet and we should face this reality, but they may spend less time online if family interactions meet some of the same needs.

So what are the real benefits of teenagers going online and entering the social networks?

- Social networking is an extension of teenagers' real-world friendships. It helps them enrich and manage their social lives.
- Socializing online can give shy, socially awkward teenagers a comfortable way to communicate -- one that's less intimidating than meeting face-to-face. This can boost their self-esteem and help them practice their social skills.
- Teenagers with unusual interests or hobbies find kindred spirits online, giving them a place to share information and enthusiasm.
- Kids who have disabilities or other challenges can communicate with other teenagers with similar problems. This lessens their sense of isolation and allows for mutual support.



However there do exist risks of going online:

- Less face-to-face interaction with family and friends, the problems which may arise in future in face-to face communication and in expressing their ideas in public orally, not in virtual space in written.
- Inappropriate information, violent, pornography, terrorist content, which may harm immature minds. There has already been created special filters, which allow parents to minimize the amount of such content, but it can only be minimized, but not completely eliminated, once a teenager searches for it he will find a way to escape all the filters.
- Online bullying and harassment by peers, also known as cyberbullying. This may be

the biggest online danger to kids. It's often an extension of bullying that takes place at school but can be just as damaging, if not more so.

Adults should not compete with the children's computers, and they should never forbid the use of the Internet (as the forbidden thing always attracts more). Only parents

can give their children real love and care, and parents should teach them how to use the Internet resources properly, so that they are not lost in the spaces of Web and the content doesn't harm their young minds. Here are some tips how to eliminate the possible negative effect from the Internet use:

- Rules and restrictions on teen's use of online technology should be set (and enforced). For example, the laptop computer should not be allowed to use in the bedroom, out of the sight and supervision.
- Parents should connect with their kids on Facebook, Twitter, Lifejournal, V Kontakte and Odnoclassniki. If the kid doesn't support this idea, parents might point out that it could be a fun way to share photos, posts, and memories with cousins, grandparents, and other relatives.
- Parents should be proactive. Teenagers should be educated about the risks of social networking and how to avoid them. Knowing what to do if you are bullied online, or using privacy settings for online profile, can protect teenagers online.
- Teenagers should be coached to use caution and common sense online. They should be reminded to think twice before posting comments, photos, or videos – all of which add to (or detract from) reputation. Once posted in the Internet, it will remain their forever. Nowadays many employees before hiring young employees check they social activity.
- The online social life should be balanced with face-to-face interaction. Teenagers should be encouraged to spend "face time" with friends, and keep family relationships strong by spending quality time together. Teenagers should not be allowed to play with smart phones at the dinner table, the same refers to their parents.



## Conclusion

Globalization affects all spheres of our lives; even the youth problems become similar in the modern world.

In my opinion, there will always exist objective reasons for the youth problems, which can hardly be eliminated without efforts from the government side. These problems are social inequality, low salaries of young adults and low levels of their employment. The well-structured youth policy should be established in each country, which will be aimed at promoting employment of young generation, as well as building patriotism among youth.

However most of other youth problems can be overcome only with involvement of parents no matter where they live in the UK or in Russia. It is not a secret that a mature, self-confident and complete personality normally grows up in a full family, with loving and caring parents, who pay a lot of attention to their children, do their best to help them determine their future carriers, who are not autocratic, but at the same time capable to gain the children's authority. Youth problems are the mirror of the problems of their parents, incapable to built strong and long-lasting relations, self-concentrated and not caring about their own children.

Once a couple decides to give birth to a child it should realize all the challenges that this decision will bring. Parents are the vivid examples for their children; they are responsible for the children perception of the family relations, responsibilities of spouses and establishment of moral principles of their kids.

In order to minimize the difficulties that the modern teenagers face nowadays, their parents should provide them with a happy childhood. Thus strong relations with their parents will help teenagers to overcome all the problems of the awkward age.

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